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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted in August and September 1983 to ascertain the perceptions of state leaders regarding censorship of K-12 instructional media center (IMC) materials during the 1982-83 school year. Of the 53 surveys sent to persons involved with state-level library media programs, 42 responses representing 41 states and one territory were received. A total of 39 surveys were completed fully enough for inclusion. This document presents an outline of survey responses covering the recording of censorship attempts, the number of districts with school board-approved selection policies, the number of districts that experienced censorship attempts in 1982-83, the educational level at which censorship attempts were most numerous, the major reasons cited for censorship attempts, the most frequent initiators of censorship attempts, the types of IMC materials most often questioned, trends or patterns related to censorship, the number of items removed or retained in response to censorship attempts, recommended resources on intellectual freedom/censorship, future concerns, the existence of state education agency publications on the subject, the types of assistance provided by state education agencies to library media specialists experiencing censorship attempts, other major sources of assistance, textbook censorship attempts, and related areas. A sample questionnaire is also provided. (ESR)

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A REPORT OF PERCEPTIONS OF CENSORSHIP OF IMC* MATERIALS IN 1982-83 FROM A STATE-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE

Survey Conducted: August-September 1983
by
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INTRODUCTION

In preparation for writing a chapter in **School Library Media Annual, Vol. 2,** a survey was conducted in August and September, 1983, of state-level library media programs in Departments of Education in the United States and its territories. The survey instrument dealt with perceptions of state leaders regarding censorship of K-12 instructional media center (IMC) materials during the 1982-83 school year. (See Appendix A for survey instrument.)

One survey was sent to each state. The person receiving the survey was asked to complete the survey if it had been received by the state-level person most knowledgeable about the status of censorship attempts of IMC materials. If the person receiving the survey was not the most appropriate person to complete it, it was requested that the survey be given to the appropriate person in the state department of education for completion.

Of fifty-three surveys sent to states and territories of the United States, forty-two responses, representing forty-one states and one territory, were received. In all, thirty-nine surveys were completed fully enough for inclusion. Not all respondents answered every question. The number of respondents is provided for each question.

In four instances, state education agency staff asked that a person outside the department complete the survey for the most accurate reflection of censorship in the 1982-83 school year in their state.

1. RECORDS

Records kept (formal or informal) of IMC material censorship attempts in each state.

Eighteen (18) respondents reported keeping records of IMC material censorship attempts.

Of these, thirteen (13) indicated that records were kept by the education agency; five (5) indicated they were kept by the state library association or the state library media association.

Twenty-one (21) respondents reported that records were not kept of IMC material censorship attempts.

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*instructional media center (may also be called library, library media center)

2. RECENT STATE SURVEYS

Three respondents reported that a statewide survey of IMC material censorship had been undertaken in the last three years.

Thirty-five (35) respondents indicated that no survey had been undertaken in the last three years.

No state respondent indicated that a statewide survey was being planned.

Those states reporting statewide surveys were:

Minnesota
Nebraska
Wisconsin

Of these, the Wisconsin survey was conducted by the state education agency. The others were conducted by the state's civil liberties union.

One state respondent indicated being unsure of whether a state survey had been undertaken in the last three years.

3. BEST SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Fourteen (14) respondents indicated the state education agency (SEA) was the best source of information on the current status of censorship attempts in the state.

Eighteen (18) respondents indicated that the SEA was not the best source of information. Usually, the state library or media association's intellectual freedom committee was cited. Some states recommended that others be contacted to provide survey information. Four of the respondents represented organizations other than the SEA.

4. ESTIMATE OF DISTRICTS WITH SCHOOL BOARD-APPROVED SELECTION POLICIES (see Figure 1).

a. Four states or 10 percent of thirty-nine respondents estimated that 10 percent or fewer of the school districts in their state have school board-approved selection policies.

b. Twenty-nine (29) states or 74 percent estimated that 50 percent or more of the school districts in their state have school board-approved selection policies.

c. Thirteen (13) states or 33 percent estimated that at least 75 percent of the school districts have policies.

d. Five (5) states or 13 percent estimated that all school districts had school board approved policies.

ESTIMATE OF SELECTION POLICIES

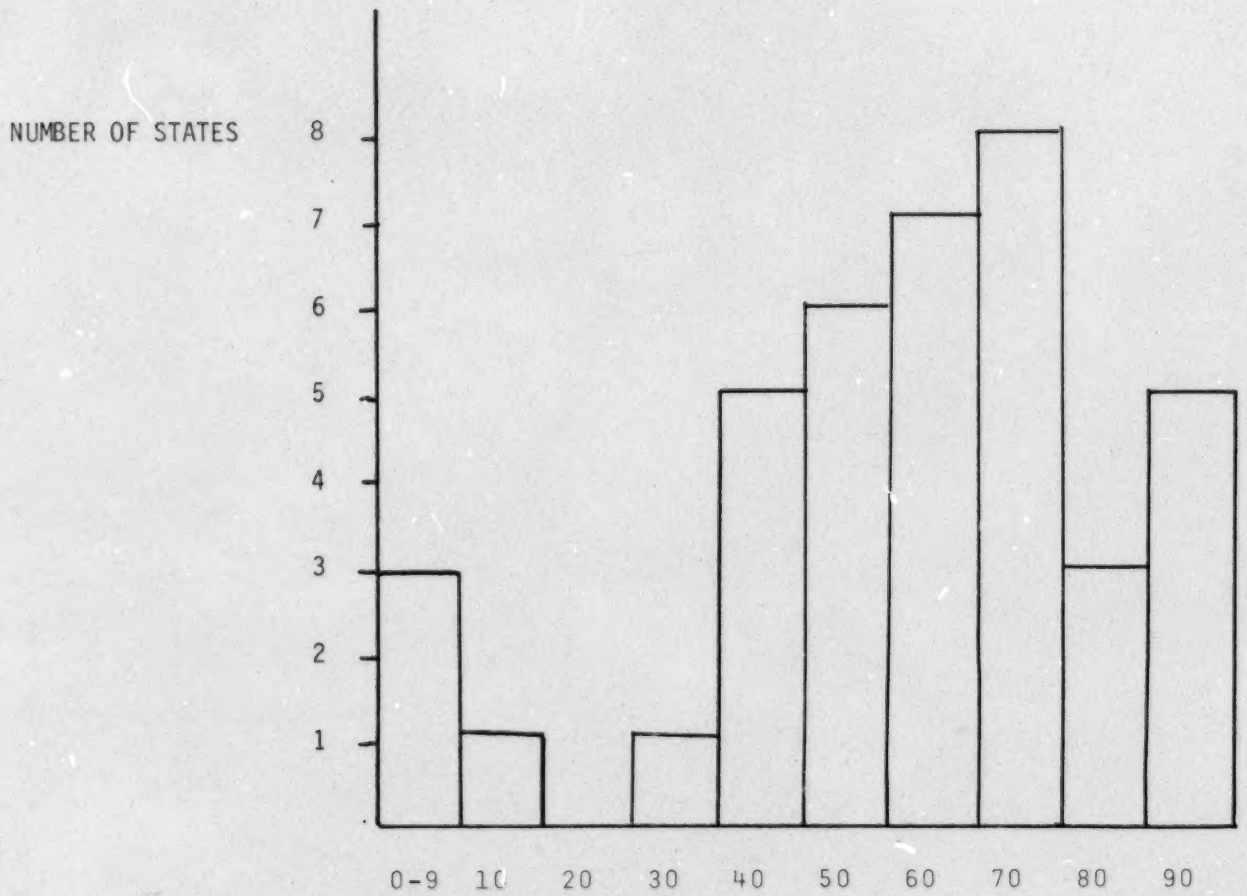


Figure 1

5. **ESTIMATE OF DISTRICTS WHICH EXPERIENCED CENSORSHIP OF IMC MATERIALS IN 1982-83** (see Figure 2).

a. Thirty-three (33) or 89 percent of the respondents estimate that 25 percent or fewer of the school districts in their state experienced attempts to censor LMC materials in the 1982-83 school year.

b. Sixteen (16) or 43 percent of thirty-seven respondents estimate that 5 percent or fewer districts experienced censorship attempts.

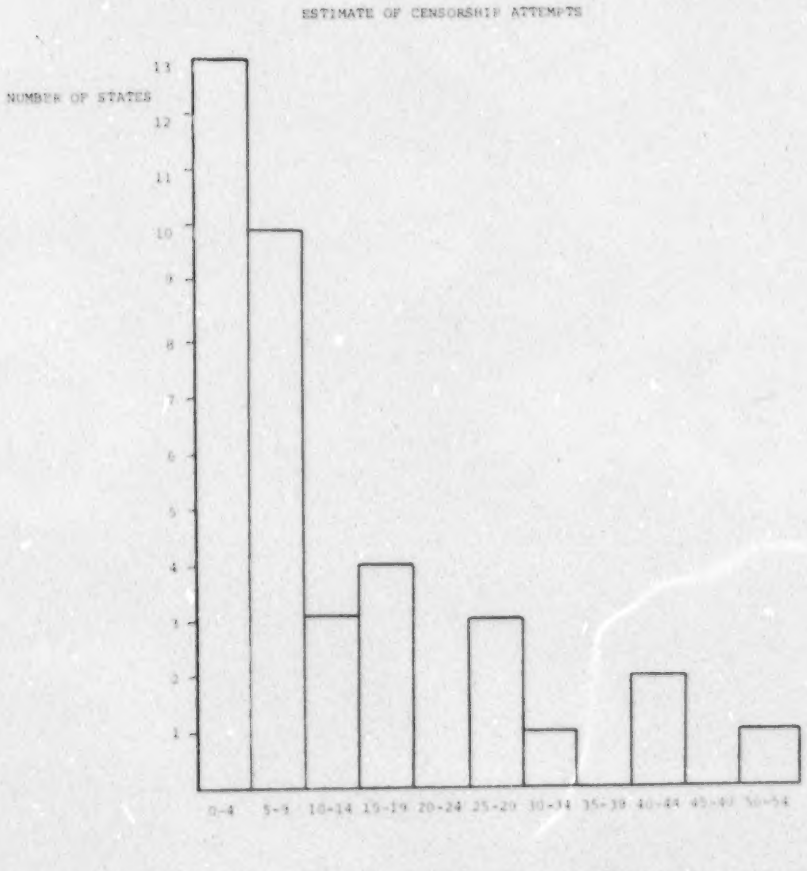
c. Twenty-four (24) or 65 percent estimate that 10 percent or fewer districts experienced censorship attempts.

d. Twenty-eight (28) or 76 percent estimate that 15 percent or fewer districts experienced censorship attempts.

e. Seven (7) or 19 percent of the respondents estimate that 20 percent or more of the districts in their state experienced censorship attempts.

f. The highest estimate was one respondent who estimated that 50 percent of the districts in the state experienced censorship attempts.

Figure 2



6. LEVEL AT WHICH CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS MOST NUMEROUS

Senior High School Level

Fourteen (14) of the respondents indicated that censorship attempts were most numerous (i.e., listed senior high as #1).

Nine (9) of the respondents ranked senior high school as #2 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

Fourteen (14) of the respondents ranked senior high schools as #3 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

Middle/Junior High School Level

Twelve (12) of the respondents indicated that censorship attempts were most numerous (i.e., listed middle/junior high as #1).

Nineteen (19) of the respondents ranked middle/junior high schools as #2 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

Four (4) of the respondents ranked middle/junior high schools as #3 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

Elementary School Level

Eleven (11) of the respondents indicated that censorship attempts were most numerous (i.e., listed elementary schools as #1).

Sixteen (16) of the respondents ranked elementary schools as #2 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

Nine (9) of the respondents ranked elementary schools as #3 in the frequency of censorship attempts.

7. STATUS OF CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

Ten (10) of the respondents reported that they feel that, on the whole, compared to five years ago the number of censorship attempts in the state was increasing.

Nine (9) of the respondents reported that they feel that, on the whole, compared to five years ago the number of censorship attempts in the state was decreasing.

Eighteen (18) of the respondents reported that they feel that, on the whole, compared to five years ago the number of censorship attempts in their state was remaining the same.

8. MAJOR REASONS CITED FOR ATTEMPTS TO CENSOR K-12 IMC MATERIALS

Ranking order:

1. Profanity
2. Sexuality
3. Obscenity
4. Morality
5. Secular humanism
6. Undermining of family values/principles
7. Human reproduction
8. Immaturity of users
9. Evolution

9. REASONS FOR CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS -- HAVE THEY CHANGED?

Six (6) of the respondents indicated that the reasons for censorship attempts had changed in the last two-three years.

Twenty (20) of the respondents indicated that the reasons for censorship attempts had not changed in the last two-three years.

Eleven (11) of the respondents indicated that they did not know whether reasons for censorship attempts had changed.

Of the six respondents indicating reasons had changed, secular humanism was listed most often as a change in the reasons. One respondent each listed right-wing pressure, creation/evolution and more explicit sex. One respondent listed all of the following reasons: sexuality, morality, profanity, family values.

Many respondents reflecting on changes in the last two-three years indicated that changes in reasons had indeed occurred, but that they had occurred more than five years ago, rather than recently.

10. MOST FREQUENT INITIATORS OF CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

Ranking order:

1. Parents
2. Citizens other than parents
3. Organized community groups
4. School principals
5. Teachers
6. Librarians/Media Specialists
7. Outside organizations

Parents were overwhelmingly selected as the most frequent initiators of censorship attempts. Other opinions clustered around rankings 2 and 3, followed by another cluster around 4, 5, 6, and 7.

11. CHANGES IN INITIATORS OF CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS IN LAST TWO-THREE YEARS

Six of the respondents felt that initiators of censorship attempts had changed in their state. The most common reason cited for this change was that more initiators represented or had contact with organized, conservative groups.

Twenty-one (21) of the respondents felt that initiators of censorship attempts had not changed in their state.

Twelve of the respondents indicated that they did not know.

12. TYPES OF IMC MATERIALS QUESTIONED MOST OFTEN IN THE STATE

Ranking order:

1. Books
2. Magazines
3. Films
4. Other AV

Books were overwhelmingly cited as the most common format questioned. Each type of material which followed varied greatly in emphasis.

13. TRENDS/PATTERNS OCCURRING

By far the trend or pattern mentioned most frequently related to the perceived organization of conservative political or religious groups. The next trend or pattern mentioned most often was the rise in the number of school districts with school board-approved policies and the perceived better preparation by educators, including library media specialists, in handling censorship problems when they arose following established procedures. A third and somewhat contradictory trend was that of self-censorship by library media specialists. No other trends or patterns were mentioned by more than one person. Among those mentioned by one respondent each were:

-- conservative groups working to assure that libraries had "their" material rather than emphasis on removal.

-- periodicals being censored.

-- problems moving to rural areas.

-- parents being more aware of what their children were reading.

-- more people concerned about intellectual freedom.

-- recent requests for actual removal rather than earlier trends expressing concern only about access to certain titles.

-- attacks on material other than books the result of purposeful search by censors.

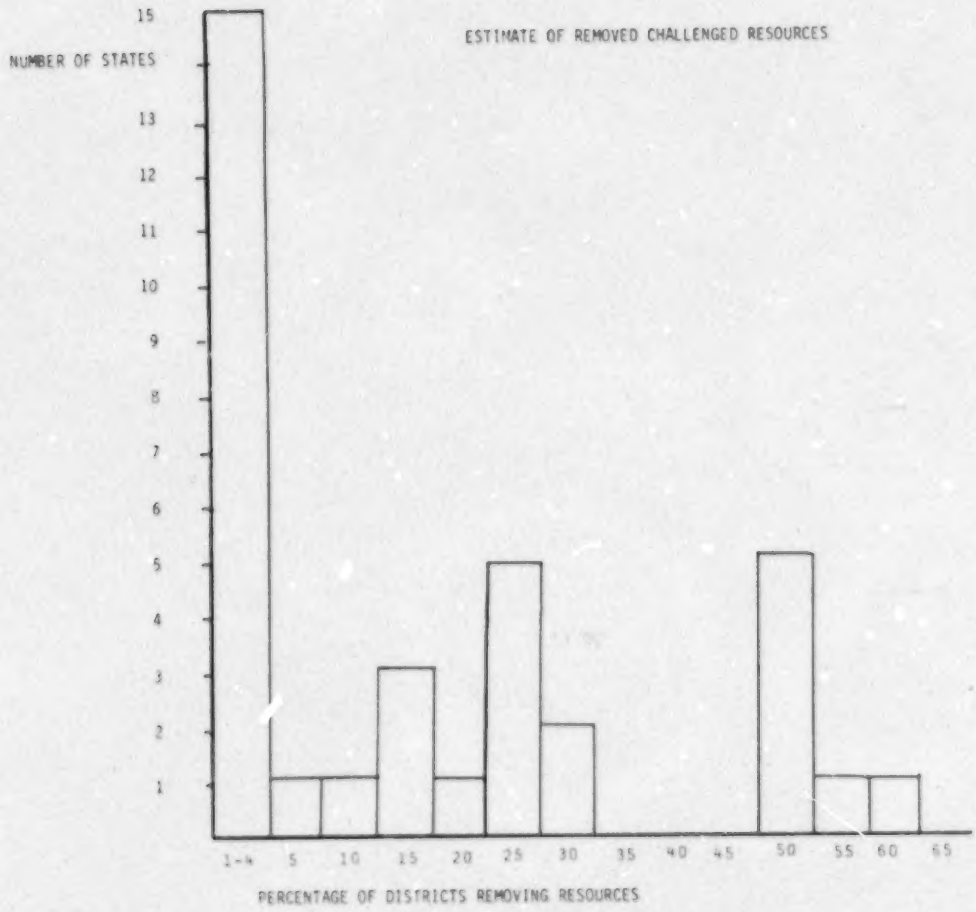
14. ESTIMATE OF QUESTIONED IMC MATERIALS WHICH WERE REMOVED ALTOGETHER (see Figure 3).

a. Seven (7) or 21 percent of the 34 respondents estimate that at least 50 percent of the questioned materials were removed altogether.

b. Fifteen (15) of the respondents or 44 percent estimate that five percent or fewer of the questioned materials were removed altogether.

c. Fourteen (14) of the respondents or 41 percent estimate that at least 25 percent of the questioned materials were removed altogether.

Figure 3



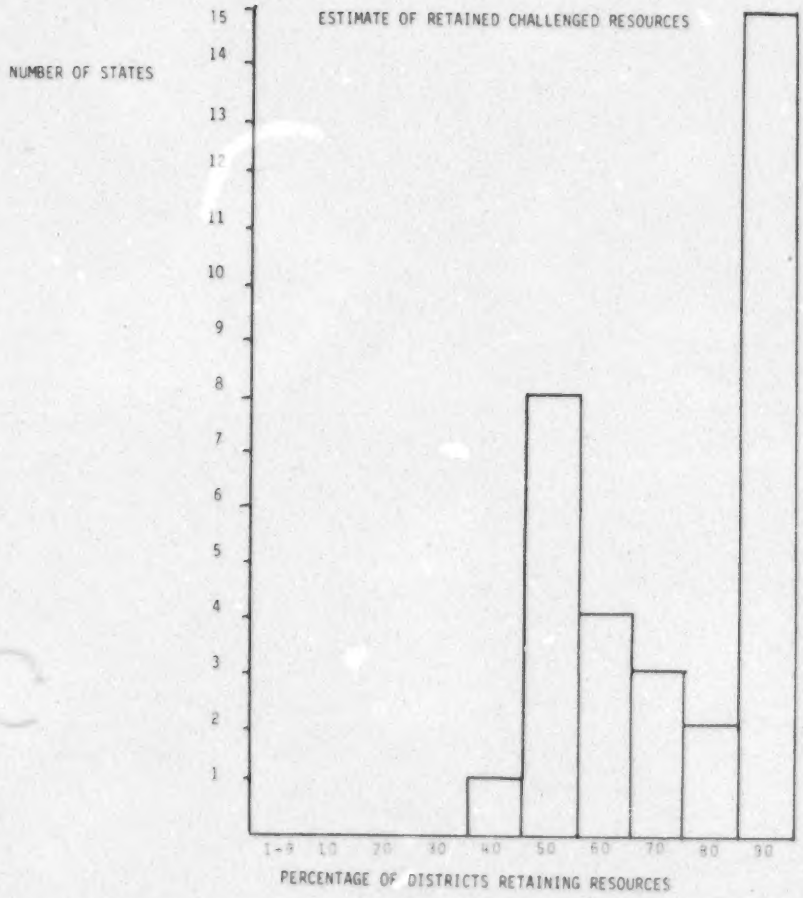
15. **ESTIMATE OF QUESTIONED IMC MATERIALS WHICH WERE RETAINED ON OPEN SHELVES FOLLOWING RECONSIDERATION** (see Figure 4)

a. Fifteen (15) of thirty-three respondents to this question or 46 percent estimate that at least 90 percent of the questioned material was retained on open shelves following review.

b. Eighteen (18) respondents or 55 percent estimate that at least 75 percent of the questioned material was retained on open shelves following review.

c. Seven (7) respondents or 21 percent estimate that 50 percent or less of questioned material was retained on open shelves following review.

Figure 4



16. RECENTLY PUBLISHED/PRODUCED RESOURCES RECOMMENDED

In order of frequency, the following recently published resources (books, films, etc.) available in the area of intellectual freedom/censorship which were mentioned by at least two respondents were:

"Censorship or Selection: Choosing Books for Public Schools", videotape produced by Columbia University in association with the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the American Library Association and the Association of American Publishers. New York: Columbia University, 1982.

Limiting What Students Shall Read. Washington, D.C.: Association for American Publishers and American Library Association, 1981.

"Books Under Fire", film produced by Grady Watts, Jr. and Arnold Bennett. Wilmette, Illinois: Films, Inc., 1982.

Dealing With Censorship, edited by James E. Davis. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1979.

The Students' Right to Know, by Lee Burress and Edward B. Jenkinson. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982.

Censors in the Classroom: The Mind Benders, by Edward B. Jenkinson. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.

Seventeen (17) of the respondents indicated that they did not have any recently published resources to recommend.

17. CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE RELATING TO CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

The most frequent concern expressed related to that of precensorship by educators, particularly library media specialists but including teachers and other K-12 educators. Other concerns stated in order of frequency by respondents were:

- convincing educators, including librarians, of the value of up-to-date, approved policies.
- power of organized conservative groups.
- education needed to help professional educators support each other in time of censorship attempts.

- lack of professional staffing at the elementary level and its effect on material selection.
- budget constraints promote censorship. When one is selective, one chooses "sure" things.

Other concerns given by one respondent each:

-- censorship trend will increase.

-- today's good literature contains unnecessary profanity and suggestive situations.

-- there is a need for more statistical data.

18. PROVISIONS OF STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

A. Twelve (12) respondents indicated that they had publications dealing with the topic of intellectual freedom/censorship. They include California, Guam, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

B. Seven states indicated that they had a state-level position paper/written statement on intellectual freedom/censorship. Those states include: Connecticut, Idaho, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Vermont.

C. Twenty (20) states indicated the provision of other materials. Most of these materials were guidelines (including samples) used in developing selection policies. These materials, in some instances, included American Library Association and National Council for Teachers of English materials.

19. ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY STATE EDUCATION AGENCY TO LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS EXPERIENCING CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

This question sought to determine what was done to help library media specialists during actual attempts. Some respondents appeared to use this question as an opportunity to share general information about services. Individual school district censorship problems appear to be generally handled at the local level. In order of frequency, assistance provided is as follows:

-- technical assistance/consultations

-- workshops, inservices, etc.
-- reviews of questioned materials
-- selection policy guidance

-- cooperative work with and recommendations of other organizations in the state

-- articles and publications including American Library Association materials (some indicated packets)

-- traveling collections from state

-- copy of state board policy

20. MAJOR SOURCES OF ASSISTANCE OTHER THAN THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

Thirty (30) respondents named other major sources of help besides themselves. Responses were similar, naming one or more of these sources:

-- library association in the state

-- school library media association

-- education association in the state

-- civil liberties union in the state

Listed less often were state coalitions and the American Library Association and school board association at the state level. People for the American Way and the Cooperative Children's Book Center (located in Wisconsin) were the sources listed once.

21. TEXTBOOK CENSORSHIP ATTEMPTS

Nine (9) of the respondents indicated that the school library media section of the SEA handles requests for assistance relating to textbook censorship requests.

Twenty-three (23) of the respondents indicated that other units of the SEA handle requests for assistance relating to textbook censorship attempts.

22. BASIS OF RESPONSES TO SURVEY

Thirty-five (35) of the respondents indicated that responses were based primarily on professional perceptions.

Four (4) of the respondents indicated that their perceptions were based primarily on statewide records/reports.

COMMENTS

Departments of Education appear to accept as a responsibility the promotion of school board-approved materials selection policies. Numerous state respondents, however, estimate that many school districts are without such policies in 1982-83.

Major concerns appear to reflect similar concerns voiced elsewhere by other librarians and proponents of intellectual freedom, namely:

- -- organization of conservative political or religious groups
- -- importance of materials selection policies
- -- precensorship by library media professionals and other educators

It is interesting to note that many state media professionals felt that others are the best source of information regarding the status of censorship attempts of IMC materials. Intellectual freedom committees of state library or media associations are viewed as major contributors of intellectual freedom information. As a group, almost half the respondents felt that censorship attempts were remaining the same, while ten (or 27 percent) felt that censorship attempts were increasing. Local school districts appear to have responsibility for the selection and reconsideration of the materials that are used in the district. Most state education agencies appear to deal mainly with the philosophy and process of selection of materials.

It was surprising to note the small number of state-level surveys of censorship attempts of IMC materials. Of the three named, only one was conducted by the state department of public instruction/education. State education agencies may find it valuable to conduct state-wide surveys to ascertain the level of censorship of IMC materials within their state.

Appreciation is extended to all respondents of the survey.

D P I WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
STATE LEVEL IMC* MATERIAL CENSORSHIP SURVEY

NOTE: Where reports or records do not exist upon which to base responses, please use your professional perceptions in responding to the questions which follow.

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete and return by **AUGUST 22, 1983** to:

DIANNE McAFEE HOPKINS, DIRECTOR
BUREAU FOR INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
P. O. BOX 7841
MADISON, WI 53707

State

Person Completing Survey | Position

Address *If different from agency address* | *Telephone Area/No.*

1. Are there records (formal or informal) kept of IMC material censorship attempts in K-12 schools in your state?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
   If yes, Does the state education agency keep those records?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If no, Please provide the name, address, and telephone number (if known) of the person or agency keeping such records.

Name of Person/Agency Keeping Records

Address | Telephone *Area/No.*

2. Has there been a statewide survey of IMC material censorship attempts undertaken in the last three years?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Survey is planned for _____
   Mo / Day/Yr
   If yes, please enclose a report of survey procedures and results.
   Results enclosed: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Under separate cover

3. Is the state education agency the best source of information on the current status of censorship attempts of IMC materials in the state?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
   If no, Please provide the name, address, and telephone number (if known) of the person or agency that is the best source of information.

Name

Address | Telephone *Area/No.*

4. Estimate the percent of public school districts in your state which have school board-approved selection policies for IMC materials: _____%
   OR Very unsure, but would estimate probably not less than _____% and probably not more than _____%

5. Estimate the percent of school districts in your state which have experienced attempts to censor IMC materials in '82 - '83 school year: _____%
   OR Very unsure, but would estimate probably not less than _____% and probably not more than _____%

6. Please rank 1, 2, or 3 each level listed below according to the level at which you feel censorship attempts are most numerous. *(e.g., #1 means attempts are most numerous at level selected.)*
   _____ Elementary _____ Junior/Middle _____ Senior

7. In considering censorship attempts of IMC materials, do you feel that, on the whole, compared to five years ago the number of censorship attempts in your state is:
   ☐ Increasing ☐ Decreasing ☐ Remaining about the same *Explain your response.*

*Instructional Media Center (also called library media center; library)

8. What do you believe are the five (5) major reasons for attempts to censor IMC materials in K-12 schools?
Please rank 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 with #1 being most frequent. If fewer than 5, rank only those that apply.

___ abortion
___ anti-American
___ defiance of authority
___ drugs
___ evolution
___ homosexuality
___ human reproduction
___ immaturity of users
___ inaccuracy
___ morality
___ nudity
___ obscenity
___ politics/political theory
___ profanity
___ racism
___ religion
___ secular humanism
___ sexism
___ sexuality
___ family values/principles undermined
___ values clarification
___ violence
___ war
___ witchcraft

___ Other *Specify* _____

9. Have the reasons for censorship attempts changed in the last 2-3 years?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
If yes, in what way?

10. In your opinion which of the following are the five (5) most frequent initiators of attempts to censor IMC materials in your state?
Please rank with number one (1) being the most frequent.

___ school superintendents
___ school principals
___ parents
___ citizens other than parents
___ organized community groups
___ school board members
___ K-12 students
___ K-12 teachers
___ librarians/media specialists
___ organization(s) outside community
___ Other *Specify* _____

11. Have the initiators of censorship attempts in your state changed in the last 2-3 years?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
If yes, in what way?

12. What do you believe are the types of materials questioned most often in your state? *Please rank with #1 being most frequent.*

___ books
___ films
___ other AV material
___ magazines
___ newspapers
___ vertical file information
___ Other *Specify* _____

13. What trends or patterns seem to be occurring which relate to censorship attempts of IMC materials?

14. In terms of the final disposition of IMC materials that have been questioned, what percent would you estimate have been removed altogether in 1982-83?

_____ %

OR

Very unsure, but would estimate probably not less than _____ % and probably not more than _____ %

15. In terms of the final disposition of IMC materials that have been questioned, what percent would you estimate have been retained on open shelves in 1982-83?

_____ %

OR

Very unsure, but would estimate probably not less than _____ % and probably not more than _____ %

16. Of the numerous resources (books, films, etc.) available in the area of intellectual freedom/censorship, are there any recently published resources that you would recommend?

☐ Yes ☐ No *If yes, please name them*

17. What concerns do you have for the future as they relate to attempts to censor IMC materials?

18. Does the state education agency offer any of the following to school boards and school district personnel?
If yes, please check all that apply.

☐ Publications dealing with the topic of intellectual freedom/censorship
☐ State-level position paper/written statement on intellectual-freedom/censorship
☐ Other *Specify* _____

Please provide a copy of any pertinent documents checked above.
Enclosed: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Under separate cover

19. Describe the assistance provided by the state education agency to library media specialists experiencing censorship attempts. *Attach additional sheet if necessary.*

20. Please list and describe any major sources of assistance other than the state education agency available to library media specialists experiencing censorship attempts in your state. *Attach additional sheet if necessary.*

21. Does the same section of state education agency which provides assistance to those dealing with censorship attempts of IMC materials also handle censorship attempts of textbooks?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, name the section which handles censorship attempts of textbooks.

_____

22. Responses provided for this survey are based primarily on: *Check one*

☐ Statewide records/reports ☐ Professional perceptions

☐ Other *Specify* _____

23. Further comments/suggestions:

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey!